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## Lula Fights Charges of Illiteracy and Rudeness with Sarcasm and Charm

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Irony was the weapon used by Brazilian president Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva to respond to criticism about his democratic credentials and lack of study leveled against him by his predecessor in the presidency, Fernando Henrique Cardoso and singer composer Caetano Veloso. Veloso called Lula illiterate, tacky and rude. Cardoso described Lulism as a kind of subPeronism.

"For an intellectual to keep watching a worker who only finished fourth grade win everything he wanted to have won and did not get for incompetence is certainly very difficult," said the president, in a very direct rebuke of Cardoso, during a speech that lasted 1 hour and 43 minutes.

At the start of his speech to thousands of activists from the PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil), who interrupted the president several times with applause and screams of approval, Lula, with Dilma Rousseff, his chief of staff, at his side said in a playful tone:

"Dilma is raring to take my place." And then added: "Dilma is the person who is going to give continuity to our project."

Both Lula and Rousseff used the national congress of the PCdoB (Communist Party of Brazil) to attack the opposition and to get votes for the 2010 presidential campaign. Rousseff was handpicked by Lula to succeed him.

Without mentioning the singer's name Lula also sent Veloso a message:

"There are people who think that intelligence is linked to how many years someone spends in school. There's nothing more stupid than that. College gives you knowledge. Intelligence is something else. And politics is one of the sciences that require more intelligence than knowledge. Intelligence to know how to put together a team, to take decisions, is not found inside books, but through character and sensibility. Anyway, life is like that. People say what they want and hear what they don't want. Life is tough."

Veloso, on a November 5 interview to daily O Estado de S. Paulo, called the president an illiterate person and said that, unlike former Environment minister and presidential hopeful Marina Silva and US president Barack Obama, Lula doesn't know how to talk.

Lula continued his talk with a large dose of sarcasm: "A country governed by an illiterate man is going to end up being the administration that has invested the most in education. We are going to end our government with 14 new federal

universities. We are doing one and a half more than they did in a century. I know that this is insufferable. Fernando Henrique Cardoso thought we would be a failure and that he would be able to come back."

The president told then that he was leaving the presidency to his chief of staff, Dilma Rousseff. "The king is dead. Long live the king," he added. "After that, I who got only to fourth grade, maybe I'll be able now to join the ProUni (the University for All program created by his administration)."

More than once he came back to the subject of intelligence and lack of it: "If there is something intelligent is the working class. There are many intellectuals in Brazil who don't believe that. (...) This week I was called an illiterate and this same week I got the title of statesman of the year." He was referring to the prize he just got in Great Britain, the Chatham House award from London's Institute of International Affairs

"There are presidents who went to study two, three years overseas. Not me." Contrary to other presidents, Lula said, he had to prove he was competent from the day he was born. "It was clear to me that if we failed, it would take another 150 years for another worker to become president."

Lula told a story about a meeting he had with paper pickers when he told to one of the men, "you can be the president of this country because we are going to leave a legacy."

He then talked about the pressure against his international policy. "They wanted me to hit Evo Morales. Evo wanted the gas that belonged to him. I could have used bravado with him, since Bolivia is a smaller country. But I could not see how a metal worker from São Bernardo (the city where Lula became a union leader) would want to fight with the president of Bolivia. I wanted to fight with Bush but he became my friend and I never had to fight with him."

Commenting on criticism over the Itaipu hydroelectric and the treaty review he signed with Paraguay, the Brazilian president explained: "There were those who said that the president wouldn't get into a fight with Paraguay because he was weak. How is it possible that a country the size of Brazil and with Brazil's wealth goes into a fight with Paraguay? I preferred to build an agreement that will give Paraguay a chance to develop."